

VZCZCXYZ0001
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHUJA #1626 2261613
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 131613Z AUG 08
FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3697
INFO RUEHYD/AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE PRIORITY 0337
RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS PRIORITY 9817
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0525
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0371

C O N F I D E N T I A L ABUJA 001626

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/W, AF/C, INR/AA AND AF/PDPA
DOE FOR GEORGE PERSON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/13/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PBTS](#) [PHSA](#) [KPAO](#) [NI](#) [CM](#)
SUBJECT: BAKASSI HANDOVER

REF: SECSTATE 86216

Classified By: A/DCM Walter Pflaumer for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

11. (SBU) Embassy Abuja has no problem with the proposed statement in para 8 of reftel.

12. (C) We are, however, concerned that attempting to build a public diplomacy campaign around the Bakassi handover might be seen by the GON as less than helpful, and strengthen the view among some Nigerians that the U.S. and the West pressured Nigeria into taking the issue to the ICJ. While the handover is no doubt seen positively in Yaounde and at the UN, it is decidedly not/not a good news story here. Nigerians from the region around Bakassi are very unhappy about it, and even for those further afield it is seen at best as an embarrassment, if not a diplomatic defeat, for their country. Nothing we say here will change that overall perception.

13. (U) In an August 12 press statement, President Yar'Adua described the handover as "very painful to all," but added that "it is a commitment we have made to the international community, and we have a responsibility to keep it." While most official comments have taken a similar tone of resigned acceptance, politicians from the region around Bakassi have been more negative. In a letter to the President which was made public August 12, Senator Bassey Ewa-Henshaw (PDP-Cross River South) claimed the Greentree Agreement "severely and fundamentally undermines the security of our country." He added that implementing the agreement would turn "40,000 Nigerians ... into refugees in their own country," and that it was "hard to imagine that anyone who loves Nigeria will insist that we go ahead to implement the Greentree agreement as it is."

14. (SBU) Press commentaries have also been uniformly negative. An August 12 editorial in "The Guardian," one of Nigeria's leading dailies, denounced the GON's decision to abide by the ICJ ruling and the Greentree agreement. "The mishandling of the Bakassi issue is soon to be compounded by the Federal Government's heedless handing over of the peninsula to Cameroon," it charged, and described as "baffling" the "enthusiastic but short-sighted contention by those in authority that Nigeria cannot afford not to abide by the decision of the ICJ." In addition, some press comments have attempted to blame the U.S. and the West for "maneuvering" the GON into sending the Bakassi dispute to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the first place. A public diplomacy campaign by this Mission would almost certainly increase such commentaries.

15. (C) Comment: As noted in reftel, we have been working hard to encourage the Nigerians to adhere to the ICJ ruling

and to their commitments under the Greentree agreement. Happily, they appear to be doing the right thing. It is also clear, however, that the GON is hoping the story disappears from the news here as soon as possible after August 14. We do not believe the GON would see a U.S. Mission effort to promote the handover as a "success story for conflict resolution" as being particularly helpful. End comment.
PIASCIK